Through the Sweet Briars

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A Drama
in
Three Acts

By Elizabeth S. Jewell

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262 Hollister Avenue
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no. 1.

Through the Sweet Briars

The Persons of the Play

REV. EDWARD FRISBIE
CAPTAIN TROTTER
MR. TRAMP
DEACON SLOCUM
BILL HIGGINS
MRS. FRISBIE
AUNT MARTHA
SOPHIE HOPKINS
MISS ANNA

KATHERINE
MARY
NED
JACK
BETTY
BABY

} Children of Rev. and Mrs. Frisbie

Through the Sweet Briars

THE FIRST ACT.

(The scene is in the citting room in the home of Aunt Martha. The furnishings are quaint, but comfortable. A rag carpet covers the floor. On the wall are chromo portraits of George and Martha Washington, a large old-fashioned mirror and a Home Sweet Home motto. At center, back of stage, is a cupboard, shelves above behind glass doors, drawers below. On the shelves can be seen old-fashioned dishes, a jar of jam, another of stick-candy, a large plate of fruit, and a standard cake dish, on which is a layer cocoanut cake. At exact center of the room is a small round table on which is the "Family Bible" and photograph album. At the left of the room, a little to center is a small stand on which rests a large pendulum clock. In front of clock, on a crocheted yarn mat, is a basket of piece-work. In the right back corner is a what-not on which are quaint ornaments, such as a china dog, a majolica vase containing a boquet of "everlastings", another vase with a bunch of peacock feathers, two or three daguerreotypes, and a basket of shells, star-fish, bright stones and other trinkets which might have been picked up at sea. Toward the front of the stage at the left is a child's rocking-chair in which sits an old-fashioned doll with "china hair". A copious arm-chair and a high-backed rocking chair are on either side the center table, a little back. Both are graced

with bright calico cushions and crocheted tidies. On the left side, near back of stage, is a door opening to the outside. On the right side, near center, is a door opening to dining room.)

(Note: "Left" and "Right" are the left and right as seen from audience.)

(Aunt Martha wears a calico dress with full skirt and a white "tea-jacket", tied in front with a lavender ribbon, a small white embroidered "turn-over" collar is fastened with a large brooch. As curtain rises, she is tying a large gingham apron, over a somewhat smaller white apron. Then she takes the cake from cupboard, places on center-table, cuts into generous pieces and carries out to dining-room, brings in glass sauce-dish which she fills with jam, carries this and the plate of fruit out to dining-room. While she works, she sings in a rather high key, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing". On her second return from dining room, she picks up doll, pats down her dress, sets her straight in the chair, continuing singing of hymn as she works.)

AUNT MARTHA.

"Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by"———

There now, Pollyanne, it's most time fur the company, (glancing at clock), so you set up an' mind your "p's and q's". (Takes basket of shells from what-not and places it on center table.) 'Spose the children would like to look over these here shells an' things—beats all where Cap'n Trotter finds so many knick-knacks to fetch home. Kind o' pleases him, though, to have me make a fuss over 'em. (Takes one or two up and looks at them.) Might as well have 'em out and around for he'll be a-comin' home now most any day. (Steps to door of dining-room and stands looking in,

hands on hips.) That's a grand-looking table if I did set it myself! I hope those blessed children will enjoy a good round square meal for once in their lives. Mercy, I've forgot the candy! (Takes jar of candy from cupboard and arranges sticks temptingly on fancy plate which she gets from what-not.) I don't see how our minister's folks are a-goin' to make both ends meet this year,—what with the new baby to care for, and the little minister's stomach goin' back on him an' all! Pollyanne, you'd best be thankful fur your stout sawdust stomach. (Carries candy to dining-room, singing), "Teach me some melodious sonnet." (Returns). (Hears knocks at door, left, opens and admits Sophie Hopkins, the village spinster. Sophie is dressed in prim visiting costume—old-fashioned figured "print" dress, plain skirt with "tied-back" polonaise, fastened at neck with stiff purple or green ribbon bow. A narrow ribbon around her waist is tied at left side in small bow with long ends. She wears a small, stiff black straw hat, with quill at side, black or white lace mitts, black slippers and white stockings.)

AUNT MARTHA.

Why, how-d'ye-do, Sophie! I ain't seen you fur the longest spell! Come right in an' set awhile. (Offers rocking-chair, but Sophie takes arm-chair.) You look clean beat out!

SOPHIE.

I am some tired, Marthy, but I ain't one o' them kind that can stay to home and fold my hands when there's the Lord's work to be looked after. Why wa'n't you to Ladies' Aid this afternoon, Marthy? (Looking over spectacles.)

AUNT MARTHA.

I couldn't go real handy today, Sophie. You see,

I'm goin' to give a little tea-party this even' and I couldn't quite spare the time fur Ladies' Aid.

SOPHIE.

(Raising both hands in horror.) A tea-party on Ladies' Aid Day! A tea-party on—Why, Marthy Brown! (Shakes fore-finger at Aunt Martha.) I don't see how you da'st! Well, (Folds hands over lap and sits up straighter.) I suppose the next thing we'll hear of you you'll be a-powderin' your face an' a-goin to one of them wicked movin' picture shows!

AUNT MARTHA.

(Hands on hips, shaking with laughter.) I'm quite satisfied with the complexion that natur' give me, Sophie, but as to the movies, I've been to a show regular once a week since they opened up here, an' I most allus find myself in good compn'y there—of course, **some** that **ain't** so good occasionally. Last evenin' Deacon Slocum set across the aisle from me, (Sophie straightens her back again and draws in her lips) an' he was so oncomf'table when he see me! He hitched an' fidgeted about, an' finally he made out like he was a-goin' to leave, but I kep' my eye on him an' I see he only changed his seat to one further back. But fur the most part (settles back and rocks gently) the folks I meet to the picture shows appears like good honest people. (Sophie rises indignantly.) Oh, don't go yet, Sophie! Stay an' have a cup o' tea. I've invited—

SOPHIE.

I'm not at all interested in who you've asked to your tea-party, seein' your givin' it on Ladies' Aid day. Seems as if the Lord's work is bein' awful neglected here lately, with our preacher away fur two full weeks an' all the church folks agoin' to the Baptist an' Methodist churches 'stid o' our'n. By the way, Marthy, we

voted at Ladies' Aid today, to take what money we're savin' this month on our pastor's salary, on account of his bein' away, to buy a strip o' carpet fur the middle aisle o' the church. We'll have to be fixin up some before the city resort folks gits here, or they'll be agoin' to the other churches, an' that would make a big difference in our summer collections. Mis' Barton says Deacon Slocum told her 'at that millionaire from Chicago that was up to the hotel last summer, dropped in as high as a quarter onto the contribution plate most every Sunday.

AUNT MARTHA.

Sophie Hopkins! You don't mean to say that Ladies' Aid is talkin' o' dockin' our pastor on his salary on account of his havin' to go away to try to ketch up in his health! Well, of all things! I can't believe it, scurcely!

SOPHIE.

Marthy, you never did have no idee of savin', did you! I'd like to know how the church'd git along if we was all as slipshod as you be about money matters.

AUNT MARTHA.

Sophie, I guess you an' me had best not git to talkin' about church affairs, if we want to stay friends, for our idees don't seem to hitch, somehow—'scuse me a minute, please, it's time to set the tea kettle over. (Goes out to dining room.)

SOPHIE.

Wonder who she's goin' to have to her tea-party, anyway. (Steps to dining room door and peeks in at table. Points to places set at table and counts to herself), one, two, three, four, five, six! H'm—She's set fur six! Well, I know some folks that'll be awful mad

that they wa'n't invited when I tell 'em about it, but I fur one don't care a mite. Howsomever, I would like to know who she is goin' to have! (Notices Pollyanne.) Well, upon my soul! What fool nonsense is this! Is Marthy Brown agoin' crazy, or is she comin' to her second childhood! (Aunt Martha enters.)

AUNT MARTHA.

I've invited our minister's children to tea, Sophie, seein' as how the church is so back on his last quarter's salary. I thought maybe a taste o' comp'ny cookin' might be appetizin', to the little folks.

SOPHIE.

H'm! If you're expecting all them Fribie younguns to tea, I might as well go—children do git on my nerves jest awful. You allus do the peskiest lot o' work fur what don't count nothin' of anybody I ever see, Marthy! Well, I must hurry along or the market will be shet up an' I want to get a little broth meat fur my cat—she ain't been herself fur a few days back. I walked better'n a mile yesterday to get her some fresh catnip, an' she wouldn't tech it. I'm awful worried over her. Mercy sakes! There come them younguns, I'll go out by the side door. (Leaves hurriedly.)

AUNT MARTHA.

Goodby, Sophie. Hope your cat'll soon be better! (Turns to greet children.) Come right in all of you an' make yourselves to home. (Takes hats and offers chairs.) Here's Pollyanne awaitin' fur you.

MARY.

(A girl of about ten years. Dark hair, tied with red ribbons—white middy with red tie.)

(Kneeling by doll's chair.) Oh! What a darling doll! May I hold her if I'll be real careful?

AUNT MARTHA.

Of course you can! That's jest what she likes—bein' held,—an' here's a smaller doll fur little Nell. You two boys might like to look at these shells an' things. They've come from ever so many interesting places. I'll have supper on in jest no time.

KATHERINE.

(A girl of thirteen, fair curly hair, tied loosely back with blue ribbon—white muslin dress.)

Can't I help you get the supper on Aunt Martha? I always help Mamma.

AUNT MARTHA.

No, you're comp'ny, now, you know. You jest amuse yourself with my stere'scope or sumpin' for a few minutes. (Exit Aunt Martha to dining room. Children entertain themselves with toys, etc.)

NED.

(A boy of nine—white waist—dark trousers.)

Wonder where all these things came from. I didn't know Aunt Martha ever traveled anywhere.

JACK.

(A boy of eight—light wash suit.)

Maybe she knows someone who does travel. Say, I bet I know! It's Captain Trotter! He gave me a shell once just like this one. I'll ask her when she comes in.

BETTY.

(A girl of six—Dutch-cut hair tied with pink ribbon—one-piece white pique dress with wide pink belt—dress low at neck and with elbow sleeves, trimmed with pink.)

(Gets up from play and goes past dining room door, gazing at table longingly, then goes to Katherine and speaks in a loud whisper), They's three kinds of cake!

KATHERINE.

Why, Betty, dear, you haven't been peeking, have you?

BETTY.

No, I didn't peek. I just went by the door an' I couldn't help seeing.

JACK.

What couldn't you help seeing?

BETTY.

Oh, lots of things—cake, an' chicken, an' bananoes, an' oranges, an'—

NED.

You didn't count the oranges, did you?

BETTY.

Yes, an' I think they's just four!

KATHERINE.

Well, if there are only four, Mary and I will go halves, because we're the oldest.

NED.

No, Jack and I will go halves because we're littler than you two an' there isn't as much room in us for oranges. (A steamboat whistle sounds.)

CHILDREN.

(All exclaiming at once.)
Captain Trotter's boat! It's the Trixie whistle! Captain Trotter's coming! (Enter Aunt Martha.) Captain Trotter's boat is coming, Aunt Martha!

AUNT MARTHA.

Yes, I thought I heard it whistle. Do you children know Captain Trotter, too?

NED.

You bet we do! Can't we run down to meet him before supper?

AUNT MARTHA.

Yes, if you wish; but supper's most ready, so you'd best ask him to come along and eat with us. He's an old-time friend of mine.

KATHERINE.

Oh, is he Aunt Martha? We didn't know you knew him too!

CHILDREN.

(Rushing out of door to right.) Goody, goody! Captain Trotter'll have supper here too. (Aunt Martha "touches up" a bit before mirror. Hears knock at door. Removes gingham apron hurriedly, uncovering white apron which she smooths down, after tossing gingham apron into dining room. Opens door smilingly, expecting to greet Captain Trotter, but changes expression to one of coldness as Deacon Slocum enters.)

DEACON SLOCUM.

(A small, thin man, about sixty years of age. Wears

frock coat and old-style silk hat. Has a goatee, which he strokes occasionally, as he talks. Carries cane and gloves.)

Well, well, Marthy, seems to me you look younger an' better lookin' every time I see you! (Sits down uninvited.)

AUNT MARTHA.

I'd like to say the same to you, Deacon Slocum, but I can't an' be real honest. How'd you like the show last night?

DEACON SLOCUM.

Why, you know I didn't go to no sech place to enj'y myself, but I'd heard so much about what an awful place it was, that I thought I'd orter go jest to see if the reports was true.

AUNT MARTHA.

(Sits in straight chair by stand at left. Takes up piece-work and sews as she talks.) Well, did you find out?

DEACON SLOCUM.

Why, it wa'n't quite so bad as I expected to find it, but they say the one next week will be a lot worse, so I suppose it will be my painful duty to look in, and if it is as bad as we fear I shall surely make a move to have the place shet up before the morals of the whole town are endangered. But, Marthy, what I called fur this even'in was on another rather painful duty. Have you heard how the trustees have found a little mistake in our pastor's accounts with the church? Before he went away, he handed the treasurer a statement of how much salary had been paid him up to date, an' he left out one or two items, though I'm not the one to say it was intentional to cheat on his part.

AUNT MARTHA.

(Sarcastically.) What items did he forget?

DEACON SLOCUM.

(Pulls carpet-covered foot-stool from under center-table, rests one foot on stool and crosses his legs, unfastens coat, puts thumbs into arm-pits, and leans back in chair complacently before answering.) Wall, you see, Hank Simm's fanning mill went back on him the last three or four bushel o' wheat, an' seein' they wa'nt no market fur it unfanned, he fetched a bushel of it jest as it was to the parson's folks to apply on his subscription to the salary. The parson said he didn't know as he could use it, seein' they hadn't no chickens, but Hank left it, ruther'n lug it back hum. An' it seems the parson's younguns fanned it by hand an' his wife biled it an' they et it after all, an' just said nothin' about it on the statement of the amount received on salary. (Puts left hand in trouser pocket and strokes goatee with right hand.)

AUNT MARTHA.

(Calmly.) Yes, an' they used better'n a cord of wood a-cookin' it, an' twa'nt only seconds at that, an' like as not tryin' to digest the stuff is what made the little minister's stomach go back on him. I think Hank Simms'd better cal'clate that he owes the parson the price of a cord or two o'wood an' a doctor's bill beside!

DEACON SLOCUM.

(Leans forward slightly, resting left hand on his knee, raps impatiently on floor with cane, which has been leaning against center-table.) Now, Marthy, don't you come to conclusions too swift. The wheat wa'n'a the only item.

AUNT MARTHA.

(Looking over spectacles.) What then?

DEACON SLOCUM.

He didn't give no credit to Mis' Beers for two nice fat chickens she sent when he was first took sick, an' she intended them to apply on the three dollars she'd subscribed to his salary. She bein' a widow, I'm special surprised that he'd take advantage of her in that way.

AUNT MARTHA.

I don't see what cause you have to be surprised at a seemin' oppression of widows—not considerin' all the mortgages you've foreclosed on most o' the helpless widows in this town! An' as to Mis' Beers' fat chickens—they were two black hens that had got too old to lay, an' they were too tough for Mis' Beers to attempt to eat herself,—with her two last back teeth not trackin'. Now see here, Deacon Slocum, if you've come in jest to gossip about our pastor's affairs, I'll have to be excused. I have some friends comin' in to tea, an' (rising as if to dismiss him).

DEACON SLOCUM.

(Rising.) Oh, excuse me, Marthy, I wouldn't for the world impose my presence where I wa'n't welcome! Good day. (Leaves hastily.)

AUNT MARTHA.

Good day, Deacon. There come my **friends** now! (Voices heard outside.) There, there, my hearties, how d'ye 'spose I can move with you strandin' me this way? (Enter Captain Trotter and children.)

CAPT. TROTTER.

(A jolly, fat man of about fifty, florid complexion,

side whiskers, dressed in a regulation ship-captain's navy blue suit, with brass buttons, a captain's cap still on his head when he enters. He carries Betty in his arms, the boys have hold of either coat-tail. Mary hangs on his right elbow, and Katherine on his left.) Heigh there, Marthy! I tried to git here sooner, but this is sure a husky little crew that piloted me here.

AUNT MARTHA.

Glad to see you, Cap'n. You've come jest in time for a real comp'ny supper.

CAPT. TROTTER.

Well, I'm right hungry, Marthy! Put on plenty.

AUNT MARTHA.

Indeed I will. (Goes to dining room. Children climb onto Cap. Trotter. Betty sits on one knee, Jack on the other, Mary climbs onto back of his chair, Katherine stands at his right and Ned sits on the floor in front of him, Turk fashion, with back toward audience.)

MARY.

Captain, did you find any giants on lonely islands on this trip?

JACK.

Or sea lions?

NED.

Or any whales or sharks?

CAPT. TROTTER.

Never seen so many whales on any voyage before,

an' sharks! Why, they were as thick as mud-turtles in a swamp.

JACK.

(Turning somesault backwards.) Ki, yi, that's bully! (The other children clap hands.)

CAPT. TROTTER.

But say! Who do you youngsters s'pose I brought home on my ship with me?

KATHERINE.

Surely not our papa!

ALL.

Oh, did you bring our papa home?

CAPT. TROTTER.

Right you are, an' a grand man he is. You may well be proud—(Patting Betty's head.)

CHILDREN.

(Interrupting.) Papa has come! Our papa has come home! (Jack and Betty jump down from Captain's lap. Mary comes around to front and all dance up and down, clapping hands. Enter Aunt Martha. Captain Trotter rises.)

AUNT MARTHA.

What is it all about?

CHILDREN.

Our papa has come home, Aunt Martha. (All rush

out of the house.) (Aunt Martha goes to the door and calls to them.)

KATHERINE.

(Running back.) Oh, please excuse us Aunt Martha, we just couldn't wait till after supper to see our papa! (Takes all the hats.) Good evening Aunt Martha, you were so kind to ask us, but we must go to see Papa!

AUNT MARTHA.

You don't suppose they're not comin' back again, do you?

CAPT. TROTTER.

I'll be blowed if I know, Marthy! They had me stranded here! Downed my jibs an' held me fast fore an' aft, but the instant I said their daddy had come home, if the little pirates didn't up anchor an' desert me!

AUNT MARTHA.

Well, they've deserted me, too, an' the best supper, I dare say, they've had spread for 'em this twelve month. Did you say our minister came home tonight on your boat?

CAPT. TROTTER.

Yes; but I had to let him off at the lower deck, he was in sech a hurry to see his wife an' babies. Marthy, (Hands in pockets.) I've never been much of a hand fur churches an' parsons an' sich, but shiver my timbers! If I didn't like that preacher pretty well! An' he's got grit to stan' by this here gospel-ship o' his'n through what I'd call a right bad sea.

AUNT MARTHA.

(Sits in rocking-chair, and takes up piece-work but

only makes pretence of sewing as she is embarrassed.) What do you mean, Cap'n?

CAPT. TROTTER.

Well, we got to talkin' an' swappin' yarns some a-ship-board, an' he says to me, says he, "Cap'n, I'm tryin' to manage a sort of ship too—yours is called The Trixie, an' mine might be called a Gospel Ship. We both have to be on the lookout pretty sharp and understand our jobs from stem to stern to make our voyages successful, don't we? Now,"he says", You've shown me many interestin' things about your ship that I never knew existed, an' sometime when you're in port come an' let me show you mine!" Well, Marthy, I've made up my mind that I'd like fust rate to go an' hear him preach some time. But, shiver my bow if I'd ever want to swap ships with him! "What fur pay do they give ye?" I asked. "Six hundred dollars an' a parsonage," says he, as proud as if it was six thousand. By old Davy Jones, Marthy, I wish't I was a church member! I'd show 'em how to take care o' their preachers. I'll be blowed, if I don't envy that little preacher in a way, though, anyhow, Marthy—to think o' havin' five little hearties like them awaitin' fur their daddy to heave into port! An' them a leavin' a mess o' your cookin' jest to smack him a half hour earlier! Say, Marthy, I'm a rough old salt but if there's any good in me, you an' your little cabin here could bring it out. I'm some like the little preacher says this here church is—not flourishin' but by God's grace an' the help of a brave little wife, an'——

AUNT MARTHA.

(Rising and laying down sewing.) There, there, Cap'n Trotter, you've gone fur enough. Come into the dining room an' have a bite to eat.

CAPT. TROTTER.

(Stepping to dining room, looking at table, and then stepping back a little.) Well, I'll be boiled, Marthy, if

this ain't good enough fur a weddin' feast! What do you say to givin' the little minister a ten dollar job a-marrying you an' me right this very evenin' an invitin' all the little pirate crew to supper?

AUNT MARTHA.

(Embarrassed.) Oh, Cap'n. This is so sudden like, —but, well . . . 'twould be a pity most to let my whole day's cookin' go to waste, now wouldn't it?

CAPT. TROTTER.

Sure we couldn't, not **your** cookin'! Marthy! Now, hurry up, an' put on your bunnit an' we'll go git 'em all back here in the wink of a shark's eye. (Aunt Martha whisks off apron, puts on bonnet and small crocheted wool shawl before mirror. Captain Trotter watches her admiringly, as she dresses to go out.)

CAPT. TROTTER.

Shiver my timbers, but you'll be the great little shipmate! (Both go out left.)

CURTAIN.

THE SECOND ACT

(The scene is a roadway running from entrance, back left, diagonally, to exit, right front. Beyond road, is a garden seat, facing audience. Extending from entrance to within four feet of exit, behind seat, is a fence, either picket or three board. The seat is placed so that the fence extends about one foot beyond the end of it, toward the exit. At end of seat, on the ground in front of fence stands a water-pail. At rise of curtain, Jack and Betty Frisbie stand near pail of water, Jack helping Betty to a drink. Ned is leaning against fence from behind, whittling. Toward front of stage at left is a go-cart in which a baby is sleeping. —a large doll should be used.)

(Note: The roadway is represented by a strip of light colored canvas. The grass in front of the road can be made with shreds of green tissue paper scattered on dark background.)

(Whistling is heard from without. Betty sets down dipper. Jack turns toward entrance. Ned stops whittling and Mary appears behind fence. She has been stooping down to pick strawberries. The boys wear gingham waists and overalls, Mary a gingham apron, Dutch neck, and kimono sleeves, sunbonnet hanging back on shoulders. Betty, light colored rompers.

Mr. Tramp enters—a man of about twenty-five, dressed in camping costume. He carries fishing rod over his shoulders. He sees go-cart, steps to it, turns back corner of blanket and takes baby's hand in his.)

NED.

I say, sir, what are you going to do with our baby?

TRAMP.

(Turning toward children.) Why, hello there! Where did you all come from? 'Pon my word, I didn't

see anyone but the baby when I came along and I just stopped to play with him a bit. It's a long time since I've seen such a fine baby as this. (Turning to go-cart.)

BETTY.

You're not a tramp, are you?

CHILDREN.
ALL.

Why, Betty Frisbie!

MARY.

(Coming around fence and approaching Mr. Tramp.) Of course, you're not a tramp, but mamma wants us to be careful about not talking to strangers, 'cause once in a while they turn out to be tramps. But please 'scuse Betty 'cause she's only six years old—she didn't mean to be rude!

TRAMP.

(Patting Betty's head.) Little Betty's all right,—I am a kind of a tramp, but not the kind that children need to be afraid of.

BETTY.

(Stepping back a little and standing with hands folded behind her.) Well, you're a nice, clean tramp, anyway.

TRAMP.

Yes; water's cheap, you know!

JACK.

(Taking hold of Mr. Tramp's coat button.) Don't

you think you ought to be doing some work 'stead o' tramping? Guess we could find you somp'n to do.

TRAMP.

(Raising hands as if to ward off trouble.) No siree! Don't speak of work or I'll not come here again. It's because they worked me so hard in New York that I want to be a tramp for awhile now.

NED.

What did you have to do in New York?

TRAMP.

(Laying fishing pole against end of seat and sitting down.) I worked in a big menagerie on Wall street. I quit my job a couple of weeks ago because I wouldn't do what the managers wanted me to do.

ALL.

(Jack occupies himself examining Mr. Tramp's fishing-pole. Betty stands at Mr. Tramp's right with her hand on his knee. Mary sits on seat at his left. Ned stands about two feet from him, facing him, hands in trouser pockets.) What was that?

TRAMP.

They tried to get me to water the stock and I just wouldn't do it!

JACK.

Why not? We like to drive our cow down to the creek, don't we, Ned?

NED.

Yes, and it would be even more fun, I should think,

watering stock in a menagerie. Bob Marks said when Ringling Brothers were here last summer, he carried twenty pails of water for the elephants and he got two tickets for the show.

TRAMP.

They promised me a whole pocket full of tickets if I'd just water the stock in the New York menagerie, but it was too dirty work watering stock in a big city. But let's not talk about **me** any more—what are you children up to?

MARY.

(Rising, resting one knee on seat and looking over back of fence.) We're picking berries from our very own strawberry vines.

NED.

And we can have all the money we get from selling the berries too. (Joins Jack in examining fishing-rod.)

TRAMP.

Where do you sell the berries?

MARY.

Up at the hotel where the people from the city are staying.

TRAMP.

That's where I got my breakfast this morning.

JACK.

(Placing himself directly in front of Mr. Tramp.) But you said you were a tramp!

TRAMP.

Well, you see, I stand in with one of the waiters up at the hotel and he usually manages to save something for me. But say—how is this? There are five strawberry beds and only four people to work them. (Mary and Ned sit down.)

BETTY.

(Pointing toward strawberry patch.) That largest bed is sister Katherine's—she fell and hurt herself.

TRAMP.

Not badly, I hope—

MARY.

The doctor says he's afraid her spine is injured. But oh! She's so brave—she hardly ever says anything about the hurt.

TRAMP.

We'll hope it will not prove very serious. But you haven't told me yet what you're going to do with all the money from the strawberries. (Is seated.)

MARY.

That's a secret, 'cause we're going to save it for Christmas.

TRAMP.

For Christmas! Don't you think you're planning for Christmas a long way ahead of time? When I was a youngster, I didn't begin savin' up Christmas money till after Thanksgiving.

NED.

But there won't be any strawberries to pick in November. (Sound of call bell.)

MARY.

That's Mother's call for Jack and Betty. She wants them to bring baby home. (Exit Jack and Betty, with baby carriage—Mary helps them off.)

JACK AND BETTY.

(Turning, Betty throws kiss.) Goodby, Mr. Tramp.

TRAMP.

Goodby children (Throwing kiss to Betty.) Well, there won't be any trout left in the stream if I don't hurry along. I'll see you all again some day. So long. (Puts fishing-rod over shoulder and leaves, left.)

MARY AND NED.

Goodby, Sir.

MARY.

(Mary and Ned sit down.) Isn't it too bad, Ned, that such a nice man as that should be a tramp?

NED.

Yes, it is,—don't you suppose we might persuade him to go to work the next time we see him?

MARY.

I'm afraid not unless he finds us working harder than we have this morning. (Goes around back of

seat. Ned follows. They carry crate of berries to front of seat.) We've picked only fourteen quarts.

(Note: Imitation strawberries can be easily made from red and green crepe paper. These should fill tops of boxes in crate. A pattern for same will be sent by author on request.)

NED.

How much will that be at eleven cents a quart?

MARY.

Let's see! 11 x 9 is 99—11 x 10 is—Oh, dear! I'll most be glad when they begin to pay only ten cents a quart—eleven cents is so hard to calc'late when it's more'n 99.

NED.

(As they set down crates of berries, Mary sits on garden-seat with back toward exit. Ned throws himself on his stomach on ground about a foot in front of Mary, facing left of stage, rests chin on hands, elbows on ground.) Never mind, we'll stop to see Miss Anna on the way to the hotel and she can tell us how much it will be without even putting it down on paper. Just think! We had $6.77 last week! Won't we have a jolly time, though, Christmas, with so much money to buy presents with? (Re-enter Mr. T. unseen by children.)

MARY.

Yes, if Sister Katherine only gets well before then —but I-I heard something today, Ned.

NED.

What was it? Something about Katherine?

MARY.

Yes; kind of about her, but not 'zackly. You see, it was this way—I was sitting in the hammock, waiting for you to change your shoes, and the sitting-room window was open, and I heard Papa and Mamma talking and Mamma told Papa that the doctor says Katherine will have to go away to a hospital and have an operation before she will be able to walk again.

NED.

(Sitting up.) Our sister Katherine go to a hospital!

MARY.

Yes, but that isn't the worst of it, for then Papa said it wouldn't be such a puzzle if the church would only pay up what they owe on last quarter's salary. But he said the trustees say there isn't any money in the treasury, but that Mr. Hardy has just sold some wheat and maybe he can pay his 'scription soon. So Papa's going to ask the trustees again, but whatever will we do, Ned, if they isn't any money to send Katherine?

NED.

Gee! She's got to go, that's all there is about that! We'll have to think of some way, Mary.

MARY.

There's our Christmas money, Ned.

NED.

(Slowly, somewhat hesitatingly.) That's so, we'll give that, and $6.77 ought to help quit a lot, oughn't it?

MARY.

Oh, my! yes; it ought to buy ever so many bottles of medicine, anway. Down at Murray's drug store they sold bottles of medicine so big for 89 cts. An' there are ever so many presents we could make for each other for Christmas, 'stead of buying things, aren't there?

NED.

Yes—lots and lots of presents.
(Mr. Tramp coughs—children see him.)

MARY.

(Both rising.) Oh, Mr. Tra— I mean Mr. Sir; you most frightened us.

TRAMP.

Call me Mr. Tramp—I don't mind. I told you I was kind of a tramp, and you know tramps don't usually like to give their right names. I'm afraid, though, you'll think me rather a bad tramp when I tell you I've been listening to what you've been saying. At least, I've heard enough to make me fear that sister Katherine was hurt rather badly. How about it?

MARY.

Yes; the doctor says he's afraid she'll have to go to a hospital an' have an operation before she'll be able to walk.

TRAMP.

When is she going? I have to go back to New York next Thursday. Perhaps I could help to take care of her on the way.

NED.

But I thought you didn't want to go back to New York 'cause that's where they wanted you to water the stock!

TRAMP.

I got a letter today saying a new job was waiting for me. I think I'll like this one better—it's cleaner work. Do you think sister Katherine could go by Thursday?

MARY.

I'm afraid not 'cause the trustees don't meet till Monday night.

TRAMP.

The trustees of what?

MARY.

The trustees of Papa's church.

TRAMP.

(Mr. Tramp sits at left end of garden seat. Ned sits on back of seat, feet hanging over, takes knife and stick from pocket and whittles. Mary sits at right end of seat.) So your father's a preacher, is he? Well, the trustees of the church don't have their say about sister do they?

NED.

No; but they have the say about the money, an' if Mr. Hardy doesn't pay his 'scription—

MARY.

(Reaches and taps Ned's lips lightly with fore-

finger.) Oh, Ned! I'm afraid that's family affairs an' it isn't polite to speak about them.

NED.

Well, we can tell our secret anyway, 'cause Mr. Tramp might know how much hospitals an' operations an' such things cost, an'—

TRAMP.

What! You've got another secret! Well, you're the greatest youngsters for secrets I ever knew—a half hour ago it was Christmas secrets, and now what is it?—Fourth of July?

NED.

No; we've decided to use our strawberry money for sister Katherine so that she can go to a hospital and get well right away.

TRAMP.

But what will you do then for Christmas money?

MARY.

Oh, we don't care about that! Spines are a lot more 'portant than Christmas presents, an' Katherine's spine is the 'portantest spine of all us childrens, 'cause, don't you remember, Ned—one day when Papa and Mamma were gone calling, and' Jack broke his arm, an' you an' Betty an' I ran away so we couldn't hear him crying when the doctor set it, an' Katherine staid an' comf'ted him and helped the doctor, an' afterward the doctor told papa that Katherine's got the best backbone in the whole lot. Now wasn't it too bad, Mr. Tramp, that it was the best backbone that had to be hurt?

TRAMP.

Well, I think there are some pretty good specimens of backbone left in the family still,—but, by the way, who are the trustees of your father's church?

NED.

Mr. Stone's one, an' Mr. Pratt's one, an'—

TRAMP.

I guess they'll do.

MARY.

Oh, say, Mr. Tramp, if—if you're goin to join the church, you don't want to see the trustees—you want to see the deacons. Mr. Hilton would be the best one —he's so kind and 'greeable, an' he won't care even if you are a kind of a tramp as long as you want to do better.

TRAMP.

(Suppressing a smile.) Thanks, little girl, I'll remember what you've said when I want to join the church. In the meantime, I'm going to write something down on this little piece of paper, (Takes checkbook from pocket) for you to hand to your father, and you tell him that a friend of mine out in New York once had a little sister who hurt her spine, and this prescription that I'm writing went a long way toward helping her get well, and I would like to have him try it for your sister Katherine.

NED.

(Taking proffered paper.) Oh, thank you, o' course we'll try it.

MARY.

And please thank your friend in New York for us too.

TRAMP.

Indeed I will. (Rising.) But I nearly forgot what I came back for—I want to buy two of your boxes of berries. I hope to catch some trout and if I do I'm going to have a little campfire dinner and the berries would help out a lot.

NED.

(Climbing down and selecting two boxes of berries.) Are you sure you want two quarts?

TRAMP.

Yes; I just might have company drop in on me, you see, and I'd want to have plenty. How much are they?

MARY.

They were eleven cents yesterday, but up at the hotel they said they might be only ten cents by today.

TRAMP.

(Hands Ned 50 cents.) This is the smallest change I have with me.

NED.

(Holding out money.) But this is a lot too much.

TRAMP.

Never mind. Buy something for sister Katherine with the rest. I'll have to hurry along now. (Exit Mr. T.)

MARY.

(Both children examine money.) Fifty cents! Why Ned, do you 'spose we ought to take it from a poor man who is just a tramp?

NED.

(Putting money into pocket.) He said he had another job waiting for him next week, you know. I guess it'll be all right.

MARY.

Here comes Miss Anna—let's ask her about it.

(Enter Miss Anna, a young lady from—(town where play is being given)—who is a guest at one of the summer cottages. She is dressed in outing costume, and carries a thermos case over her shoulder and a boog and pillow under her arm. Children run toward her.)

MARY.

Miss Anna, will you please help us count up how much we'll have when we've sold these berries? There are twelve quarts—how much will that be at 11 cents a quart?

MISS ANNA.

(Miss Anna sits at right end of seat, arm around Mary, who sits beside her.) When I went to school 11 cents times 12 cents was $1.32, and with what you had last week—$6.77 was it? (Children nod.) Let me see, why you'll have more than $8.00. What a grand Christmas you'll have this year!

NED.

(Stepping out and facing Miss Anna.) But we're not going to save this money for Christmas now.

MISS ANNA.

Why not?

MARY.

(Miss Anna sits at right end of seat, arm still around Mary, who sits beside her.) Oh, Miss Anna, I forgot you didn't know—sister Katherine's got to go away to a hospital and we're going to use our strawberry money to help pay her 'spenses.

MISS ANNA.

Why, is it as bad as that? When is she going?

NED.

Mr. Tramp said—Oh, you don't know about Mr. Tramp, do you?

MISS ANNA.

Mr. Tramp! Whoever is he?

MARY.

Why he's the nicest man you ever saw. He came by here a little while ago, an' he wanted to buy some berries, 'cause he was going down to the trout stream an' he said he wanted to have a camp-fire supper, and'—

NED.

(Interrupting and displaying money.) An' he bought two boxes 'cause he said he might have comp'ny drop in on him for supper—an' what do you 'spose!—he paid us fifty cents for just two quarts of berries, so he couldn't be a very poor tramp.

MISS ANNA.

But what did that have to do with Sister Katherine's going to the hospital?

MARY.

Well, Mr. Tramp said he was going to New York next week to work again, and perhaps he could help take Katherine.

MISS ANNA.

(Interest awakened.) He's going back to New York! What's he going to do there?

NED.

Well, you see, he used to work in a menagerie on Wall street, but now—

MISS ANNA.

(Interrupting.) Work in a menagerie on Wall street? Oh, yes; I see (smiles).

MARY.

But he isn't going to work there any more 'cause he didn't want to water the stock.

MISS ANNA.

(Increased interest.) What!—is he really going to leave the exchange—I mean the menagerie?

NED.

Yes, he said watering the cows in the city was dirty work— 'spose they don't have nice clean creeks like our's near the city.

MISS ANNA.

(Laughing.) Well, I'm glad if he's found more pleasant work—when did you say he was going back?

NED.

Next week, and—oh, yes, see here. He gave us this prescription to give to papa for medicine for Katherine's spine. He said he had a friend in New York whose little sister hurt her spine, and this medicine helped her to get well. (Shows Miss Anna Mr. Tramp's check.)

MISS ANNA.

(Reads from check.) "$500"! "John Goodwin!" (Aside.) Isn't that just like Jack!

NED.

$500.00! It wouldn't cost as much as that, would it? Just one bottle?

MARY.

Dear me! We'd never get that much money all summer long.

MISS ANNA.

Oh, it wouldn't cost your father nearly as much as that! Be careful not to lose that paper. It's a very valuable prescription. You'd better run right home now and give it to your father and tell your mother that I'll come in this evening to help plan for Katherine to go to the hospital.

MARY.

Oh, will you, Miss Anna? I'm so glad.

MISS ANNA.

Run along now and don't lose that prescription.

CHILDREN.

We'll be careful of it.
(Exit children, right.)

MISS ANNA.

I wonder how pimento sandwiches and coffee would go with brook trout and strawberries?
(Exit, right.)

CURTAIN.

THE THIRD ACT

(Time: The day before Christmas.)

(Scene: The sitting-room in the Frisbie home. Entrance is on the left near back of stage as in other scenes. A door on the right near center leads into bed-room. At center back is a medium size oblong table, placed with end toward wall, which Mr. Frisbie is using for a desk. He sits at the right of table writing, wearing a house coat which has seen better days. Mrs. Frisbie, dressed in dark skirt, white shirtwaist and light colored house apron, sits at small table at left side of room a little toward front of stage, mending stockings. Across right back corner is a small cabinet organ, at which Mary sits playing and singing "Soft and Low". Mrs. Frisbie is also singing softly as curtain rises.)

MARY.

(Wears a navy blue dress, red tie and hair ribbon.)

"————

While my little one
While my pretty one
Sleeps."

Oh, dear! I do wish we had a piano, this organ is so hard to pump!

MRS. FRISBIE.

It would be fine if we had one, wouldn't it? But I think, Dearie, that our home songs sound very sweet with the organ, and you know we couldn't have even that if Deacon Hilton hadn't given it to us, so let us be happy with what we have.

BETTY.

(Enters from bed-room. Wears simple winter play

dress and bright hair bow. Holds up warning finger and speaks softly.)

Hush, everybody, baby brother is asleep in the doll bed.

MRS. FRISBIE.

(Rising.) In the doll bed! The little cunning! Mother'll go see if he's comfortable. (Peeps into bed-room.) Come quick, Edward, did you ever see anything so adorable? (Both stand looking into bed-room for a few seconds.) See, girlies, the stockings are mended in time to hang up for Santa Claus! (Holds up bundle of stockings which she threw over her arm as she stepped across the room.)

BETTY.

(Running to window.) Oh, goodie! It's snowing so Santa's reindeer can get here, can't they papa? (Climbs on back of chair in which Mr. Frisbie has re-seated himself.)

MR. FRISBIE.

(Looking up from work.) It does begin to look more hopeful outside.

MRS. FRISBIE.

(Stepping out from bed-room.) Don't you girlies want to go out and play awhile in the snow?

MARY AND BETTY.

Yes, yes. (Mary brings her wraps and Betty's. Mr. Frisbie helps Betty with her coat and rubbers; pulls down her cap and kisses her.)

MARY.

Don't you wish Katherine could be home for Christmas, papa!

MR. FRISBIE.

That would be fine, wouldn't it? But you know sister Katherine is such a brave little girl that she is willing to stay at the hospital until she is perfectly well and we must be as brave as she is. The afternoon train will be in soon and the boys have gone for the mail. Perhaps we'll have a letter from Katherine.

MARY.

Maybe we'll all get letters from her 'cause tomorrow's Christmas.

BETTY.

(Dancing up and down.) Tomorrow's Christmas and p'rhps Santa Claus'll bring me a baby doll!

MR. FRISBIE.

Now hurry along out of doors so baby brother can have a good sleep. Then he'll be good natured tomorrow and let you have time to play with a baby doll if one should happen to come.

MARY.

(As children go out.) If you get a baby doll, I'll play Paul is my doll and—(Exit).

MRS. FRISBIE.

(Coming in from bed-room carying small baby doll.) See, Edward, the head did fit the body I made pretty well, didn't it? And I finished dressing it but I had to sew until two o'clock this morning.

MR. FRISBIE.

(Rising and taking doll in his hands.) It looks fine,

little mother! Let's see—what have we for Mary's stocking and the boy's?

MRS. FRISBIE.

Have you forgotten? Mary is ten years old tomorrow so she is to have the locket my mother gave me the day I was ten. (Goes to bed-room and gets little velvet case and shows locket enclosed.) Isn't it a dear, I used to be so proud of it when I was a little girl!

MR. FRISBIE.

There's your picture in it, too. It looks just like the little girl I kissed one day at recess when we were playing—

MRS. FRISBIE.

Shame on you!

MR. FRISBIE.

Oh, I notice you dropped the handkerchief behind me again next day!

MRS. FRISBIE.

Well, May Watson dared me to—but I haven't shown you what I have for the boys' stockings and I'll have to hurry or they'll be coming. (Brings out mechanical toys for both boys.) I suppose I was extravagant—Bert's cost seventy-five cents and Ned's a dollar, but I used some of the money Mrs. Hilton paid me for tutoring Charles in his Latin. You know, Edward, how brave the boys were about giving up their Christmas money for Katherine's hospital expenses, and that, too, after they had studied that toy catalog for months. I found pictures of these very toys in the catalog marked with the boys' names, and I just couldn't resist sending for them.

MR. FRISBIE.

(Takes toys out of boxes and tries them out on the floor.) I want to play with them myself. I'm mighty glad you got them. (Looks at watch.) Won't the kiddies be surprised to see Katherine?

MRS. FRISBIE.

And Oh, Edward! To think that Katherine has entirely recovered! It does seem as if we ought to be at the depot to meet her, doesn't it? But it was her own plan to have Captain Trotter bring her home to surprise the children.

MR. FRISBIE.

Let's see; how's it going to be? First Miss Anna and Mr. Tramp are to come in, and after the children get over that surprise Katherine and Captain Trotter are to arrive—is that the plan?

MRS. FRISBIE.

Yes, that's it. It seems as if I couldn't wait so long to see our little girl, but you know, Edward, how she always has loved to surprise the other children, and perhaps they would enjoy it better this way. There's the train whistle now.

MR. FRISBIE.

That's the mail train on the other road. Katherine's train is not due for a half hour.

(Knock at door. Mrs. Frisbie opens, enter Sophie Hopkins, wearing prim calling costume.)

MR. AND MRS. FRISBIE.

Good afternoon, Miss Hopkins.

SOPHIE.

Good afternoon. (Mrs. Frisbie offers chair.) No, thanks, I'll not set down. I just dropped in to bring an offering that I decided after many prayers, to lay on the altar of the Lord's cause, or, in other words, to give it for the use of the children of the Lord's servants. (Hands large cotton umbrella to Mr. Frisbie.) It's an umbrella that I've been real choice of a right long spell. My Aunt Marrier carried it to meetin' every Sunday as long as she was able to walk there, so it's some faded, but I've allus kep' it up in my attic an' took care of it. But Aunt Marrier died a spell ago, and seein' as how she didn't leave me nothin in her will, I don't see as I have any call to be beholdin' to her mem'ry, so I made up my mind to get rid of all the rubbish I've been storin' since she seemed like to die fifteen years ago—not that this umbrella's rubbish—they ain't a hole in it, and it orter keep some of the freckles off'n your children next summer. Land knows they got freckles enough last summer playin' out bareheaded. I s'pose 'twa'n't none of my business, but I didn't think they 'peared real respectable fur minister's folks' younguns, freckled so.

MR. FRISBIE.

I'm sure this is very thoughtful of you—we were just trying to plan some Christmas enjoyment for the children.

MRS. FRISBIE.

It is not too early to wish you a Merry Christmas, I hope, Miss Hopkins?

SOPHIE.

No, I s'pose not.

(Knock at door. Enter Aunt Martha Trotter, nee Brown.)

AUNT MARTHA.

Merry Christmas, everybody! Why how-dy-do, Sophie, you ain't agoin' jest 'cause I came in, be ye?

SOPHIE.

No, but I must take this catnip home to Tabby, 'Tain't very good fur her, bein' dried catnip, but it's the best they had into Murray's Drug Store. Good afternoon. (Exit.)

AUNT MARTHA.

I'm afraid Sophie's cat won't get as much attention after a spell. I hear the Deacon don't take kindly to cats.

MR. FRISBIE.

What Deacon? What do you mean, Martha?

AUNT MARTHA.

Why ain't you heard? Sophie and Deacon Slocum's agoin' to get married.

MRS. FRISBIE.

Are you sure, Martha? I can't imagine either the Deacon or Miss Hopkins being in love.

AUNT MARTHA.

Well I guess they ain't much love lost by either one, but the Deacon's bought the property a-jinin' onto Sophie's an' I heard they thought it 'ud reduce the taxes on both pieces if they was throwed together. Funny how some folks looks at such things,—now the Captain and I—Oh, by the way, here's a little bakin' I brought along for your Christmas dinner. (Opens bas-

ket which she had set down as she came in.) I fetched the turkey right along in the drippin' pan, 'cause I thought like you'd want to finish roastin' him tomorrow. They're all a-comin' ain't they—Mr. Tramp and Miss Anna as well as our blessed little Katherine?

MRS. FRISBIE.

Yes, they'll be here now in about half an hour. But, really Martha, you shouldn't have brought such an abundant gift! Why, here's our whole dinner and enough cookies and doughnuts to last over the holidays.

AUNT MARTHA.

Oh, I didn't do it all alone. The Captain cut out all the cookies, and he made the gingerbread men, too. He's a great hand for the little folks, you know. He's goin' to surprise them sure tonight, when he brings Katherine. I guess I won't tell all his plans; it'll be more fun fur us old folks to get a little surprised, too.

(Enter Ned and Jack with the mail.)

NED.

(Handing mail to Mrs. Frisbie.) Two letters, and both from—(naming town where play is being given)—one from—(naming some local freight office)—and the other from Mrs. —(naming chairman of Home Missionary Committee of the church giving the play.)

(To illustrate, if the play were being given in Detroit under the auspices of some Congregational Church, and the chairman of the Home Missonary Committee were a Mrs. William Brown, he might say, "Two letters, and both from Detroit! One from the Pere Marquette Freight Office, and one from Mrs. William Brown.")

MRS. FRISBIE.

They must both be about the missionary barrel! I

do wish it might have come in time for the children's Christmas! We hoped—

JACK.

(Interrupting.) Mamma, Oh, please, just a minute, 'cause it's getting dark so fast! Can't, Ned and I get out our sleds and go coasting for awhile?.

MRS. FRISBIE.

Certainly, but don't go out of call because Sister Katherine will be here soon, you know.

(Boys get sleds from right back corner of living-room, where they have been standing against wall, under a hat rack on which are hung children's out-of-doors garments, etc.)

NED.

(As both rush toward door at left back.) We'll each go down only twice.

AUNT MARTHA.

(Handing the boys cookies from her basket.) Here, boys, you take some cookies along to stay your stomachs!

JACK.

You bet we will! (Exit both boys, munching cookies.)

AUNT MARTHA.

(To Mr. Frisbie, who is reading letter.) If that's about a missionary box a-comin', would you folks mind a-callin' me in to see you open it? I've allus had an idee that missionary boxes wa'n't all they was cracked up to be—mostly second hand clothes an' sech, ain't they?

MRS. FRISBIE.

Oh, generally they are a great help, and this one from—(Name of local church)—I am sure is going to be fine, for Mrs.—(Name of chairman of Home Missionary Committees)—wrote and asked us just what we most needed, and said they—

MR. FRISBIE.

(Interrupting.) Just listen to this from the freight office at—(naming town where play is being given.)

(Reads from letter.) "This is to say that a box and a barrel were shipped to your address December 15th." Why, they must have been at the depot several days!

(Enter Mary and Betty.)

MARY.

Papa, Mr. Higgins is stopping here with his dray, an' he's putting off a barrel an' a box for us.

MR. FRISBIE.

Yes, the letter says—

CHILDREN.

(Dancing about in glee.) The Missionary Box! The missionary box!

MARY.

And a barrel too! Goody, goody, they've come!

(Mr. F. goes out and re-enters with drayman carrying in freight).

MRS. FRISBIE.

I'm so glad they **did** come in time for Christmas!

AUNT MARTHA.

Well, I'm mighty glad to see one of them Missionary barrels with my very own living eyes!

BETTY.

I hope they won't break anything.

MARY.

They couldn't break clothes, could they?

BETTY.

They might be a doll or somp'n that they could break.

MARY.

But let's not 'spect it, or we might be 'spointed.

MR. FRISBIE.

(To drayman.) When did these come? I had a letter this evening saying they were shipped over a week ago.

DRAYMAN.

Seems to me now they did get her along back the fust o' the week, but they want nothin' to c'lect on 'em so it kinder slipped my mind.

MR. FRISBIE.

What do I owe you for delivering them now?

DRAYMAN.

Wall, I calc'late to charge twenty-five cents fur

each piece as a gineral thing, but the Parson's folks orter have it a little cheaper, I 'spose, so—well—we'll call it forty-five cents fur both this time.

MR. FRISBIE.

That's very kind of you (draws out all the contents of his pocket). Let's see! Here are thirty-six cents, and we'll look for the rest.

MARY.

There's a nickel on top of the kitchen clock, Papa—I saw it there this morning when I was dusting (runs to kitchen and returns with money, which she gives to her father.)

BETTY.

I lost a penny down the back of this chair last winter. (She searches for penny.)

MR. FRISBIE.

Here's all we seem to find—forty-two cents. (Hands it to drayman.)

DRAYMAN.

Wall, that'll do fur now, Parson—'taint as if I couldn't see you any day. Some time or 'nuther you can hand me the other three cents when so be it's handy.

AUNT MARTHA.

Bill Higgins, ain't you ashamed o' yourself. Here, take this fifty cents (takes purse out of petticoat pocket) an' don't you ever let me here you a-bragging how you've ever done anything for ministers' folks. Here you've kept 'em waitin' a whole week most for their

freight, an' then thinkin' to square it with chargin' 5 cents less. I'm 'shamed to be a talkin' to **you**—g'long and see if they ain't some more Xmas boxes you're keepin' away from folks by your 'tarnal laziness.

BILL H.

I got to go home to supper now an' I don't guess I'll work no more this afternoon, seein' tomorrow's Christmas. Much 'bleeged, Marthy. (Exit drayman.) (Enter Ned and Jack.)

BOTH.

The Missionary box! The missionary box!

MR. FRISBIE.

Shall we eat supper before we see what's in this barrel and box?

CHILDREN.

Oh, no, no! (Boys bring in axe and hammer and Mr. Frisbie pries off head of barrel.)

MRS. FRISBIE.

Be careful, Edward, don't break the barrel—it will come in handy the next time we move.

(First from barrel comes bundles of magazines.)

MR. FRISBIE.

If these could have come one at a time last year, they would have helped me to keep up with outside affairs.

(Next come two vests tied together.)

MRS. FRISBIE.

They are of different sizes, and I'm afraid one is too large and the other too small. Try on the smaller one, Edward, your Sunday vest is so shabby.

MR. FRISBIE.

(Tries on vest which proves too small.) It must have belonged to a school boy. Let's try the other one. (Changes.) No, I'm afraid this won't do.

AUNT MARTHA.

Perhaps it would if you'd move the buckle over, Mis' Frisbie. (Various article follow from the barrel, such as summer hats, old-fashioned cloak, rolls of patch-work pieces, old shirts, children's clothes suited to no one in the family, girl's dresses size for Frisbie boys, boy's Buster Brown suit—not right size for anyone, infant's apparel, too small for Frisbie baby, out of date dress-suit coat without trousers, a very pretty summer dress, too small for Mrs. Frisbie.

AUNT MARTHA.

Suds an' garters! If this isn't the beatin'est fraud I ever see!

MRS. FRISBIE.

I believe there's been some mistake made. Didn't you say, Edward, that there was a letter from Mrs.—(Name chairman Home Missionary Committee). Maybe that will explain things.

MR. FRISBIE.

So there was (goes to desk.) Here it is. (Reads.) Mr. and Mrs. Frisbie,

Our Dear Friends.

Through some misunderstanding, the baggage man

who was sent to our church to nail up and take to the freight depot the barrel of clothing and other gifts which our society had packed for your family, has sent the wrong barrel. There was another barrel in the same room into which one of our church circles was collecting articles for a rummage sale, and that was the one sent to you. We have just learned of the blunder and are shipping today the right barrel, which we trust contains much more acceptable things. We are so sorry this mistake was made and I am afraid that it is too late now for the right barrel to reach you before Christmas, which is indeed too bad, especially as it contains some personal Christmas gifts for all. Our hope now is that they may serve to brighten the beginning of a glad New Year for you all.

Faithfully yours,
Mrs.—(Name Chairman of Home Missionary Committee.)

MRS. FRISBIE.

I just felt there must be some mistake about these things having been meant for us.

JACK.

We haven't opened the box yet.

MR. FRISBIE.

That's so! I'd forgotten there was a box. (Picks up hammer then notices label on box.) Aha! What's this! "Not to be opened till Christmas", and signed "Santa Claus!"

BETTY.

A Christmas box from Santa Claus!

CHILDREN.

A box from Santa Claus! Goody!

NED.

Can't we open it tonight?

MR. FRISBIE.

It seems to me you take a good deal of interest, Ned, for one who doesn't believe in Santa Claus!
(All laugh.)

MR. FRISBIE.

I'll just loosen up the cover a little, since this is Christmas eve. (Begins to pry cover loose from box. Knocks heard at door.) (Enters Miss Anna and Mr. Tramp. Cordial greetings from all.)

MARY.

Why, we didn't know you knew our Mr. Tramp Miss Anna!

TRAMP.

Oh, you Frisbie youngsters needn't think your's is the only secret society! We've been planning a long time to give you this little Christmas surprise.

MR. FRISBIE.

Speaking of surprises, this box is an evidence to me that there is a pretty active secret society working somewhere, of which Mrs. Frisbie and I have been kept in ignorance.

TRAMP.

Well, you see, old Santa has to have his little joke once in a while to keep him young.

MRS. FRISBIE.

We've just been enjoying a joke, which partly

accounts for the confusion of this room—(Naming local church) was going to send us a Missionary barrel, and by mistake of the baggage man they've sent a rummage sale barrel instead.

MISS ANNA.

A rummage sale barrel! Well, I though this hat had a familiar look!—(naming some well-known member of the church missionary society, preferably someone who has been married two or three years—someone who is probably at present in the audience) used to wear this when she was—(calling her by her maiden name) and this dress! Why,—(naming someone well known in the church about whom there are rumors of an approaching wedding)—had this dress new last summer! It looks as if someone beside myself is planning on having all new clothes for next summer.

TRAMP.

Sooner than next summer, Dear!

MARY.

Why, Miss Anna, I think your clothes are just beautiful as they are!

MISS ANNA.

Well, you see, Dearey, I—we—

TRAMP.

You don't know just how to tell about it, do you! Let me try! (Stands with hands in trouser pockets, looking at children who line up in front of him.) Now see here, Kiddies, Miss Anna's going to give a great big party down home in—(naming local church) in a few weeks, and she's asked me—

MISS ANNA.

I did **not** ask you!

TRAMP.

No of course she didn't ask me, but I've invited her,—Oh, bother, someone to take my job quick,—here, Aunt Martha, you explain to them, can't you?

AUNT MARTHA.

Sure I can. You children all know about wedding parties, don't you?

NED.

You bet we do! You and Captain Trotter had a dandy!

JACK.

It was the only time in my life I ever had all the ice cream I could eat.

AUNT MARTHA.

Well, Mr. Tramp and Miss Anna are going to have a wedding party in—(naming town where play is being given).

MARY.

Oh, goody! Can we all come to it?

TRAMP.

Sure, every one of you!

BETTY.

Are you and Miss Anna going to get married together?

MISS ANNA.

Yes, Dearie, pretty soon after Christmas.

JACK.

Well, if we've got to wait till after Christmas for that party couldn't we open the Christmas box the night before Christmas?

MARY.

But, you know, Jack, Santa Claus wrote on this tag—(reading from label on box). "Not to be opened till Christmas", and of course we wouldn't—(knock at door, Mrs. Frisbie opens and Santa Claus enters.)
(Cries of Santa Claus! Santa Claus!)

SANTA.

Merry Christmas, everybody, you see I got here all right, but my pack was too big this time to get it down the chimney. Do you care if I bring it in through the door?

CHILDREN.

Oh, no, bring it in! Bring it in!

SANTA.

Not till you kiddies have guessed what's in it for you. It's something you want awful bad. Now what do you want, Jack!

JACK.

A great big drum.

SANTA.

Not so noisy as that—your turn, Ned!

NED.

A bushel of candy.

SANTA.

It's pretty sweet, but that's not quite right. Betty, what did you want Santa to bring you?

BETTY.

A cunning baby doll that can go to sleep and can say "mamma!"

SANTA.

Most had me that time, hot, hotter—now, Mary, what Christmas present do you want most of all?

MARY.

Oh, I'd like a lot of things, but I wouldn't ask for any other present if only Sister Katherine could be home with us for Christmas.

SANTA.

Mary gets her wish, so now I'll bring in my pack. (Steps outside and re-enters, carrying a huge bundle rolled in a buffalo robe. He opens the bundle and out jumps Katherine.)

KATHERINE.

Merry Christmas everybody! (Hugging and kissing on the part of everyone—cries of "Katherine, sister Katherine's here!" "Oh, joy!" etc. When the excitement subsides a little, Santa crosses the room and embraces Aunt Martha.

BETTY.

Oh, see! Santa Claus is hugging Aunt Martha!

SANTA.

(Removing Santa Claus disguise, and disclosing himself as Captain Trotter.) "Shiver my timbers, who's got a better right—I'd like to know! (Cries from the children, dancing and prancing around.) Oh, it's Captain Trotter. It's Captain Trotter!

MARY.

Why, just see, people, Katherine can walk!

KATHERINE.

Oh, yes; I'm just as well and strong as I ever was. (March across room. Everyone exclaims delightedly.)

NED.

Let's have a parade and Katherine and I will lead, and you all be in it!

MARY.

I'll play a march.

CAPT. TROTTER.

Hold fast there. I had right good luck once turning a or'nery every-day party into a weddin' party. What's the matter o' turning this parade into a wedding march, and lettin' Mr. Tramp tow along behind with Miss Anna? (Mary starts a wedding march. All fall in line and march around room twice. Enter Sophie Hopkins on Deacon Slocum's arm, she carrying a huge bouquet and he wearing a buttonhole bouquet. They join the procession. All march again around stage.)

CURTAIN.

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